



Reviewing the schedule of activities for a Police Explorer Post 9774 meeting are, seated from left, Amanda Schmidt and Post adviser Dustin Poncin. Other advisers standing, from left, are Daniel Stumpf, Kyle Jahns, Edward Ucinski and Kathy Koenig.

## CERT training helps West County woman save her family from fire

By JIM ERICKSON

Amanda Schmidt believes in being prepared. That philosophy led her to a course of study at St. Louis Community College's Meramec campus that includes both art education and law enforcement. Conceding that the latter currently is her primary interest, she noted, "There may come a time in my life when work in law enforcement may not fit well with other responsibilities I could have, including family."

In that situation, art education would come in handy, she said.

Being prepared also led the 20-year-old West County resident to complete a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training program two years ago while still a student at Parkway South High School.

The benefits of that program were proven this fall in an incident she prefers hadn't happened. In the early morning hours of Oct. 17, her family's ranch-style home on Rainfield Court caught fire when a dehumidifier in the basement exploded. The noise woke up Amanda, whose bedroom is in the basement. When she opened the door of her room to see what had happened, she saw flames going up the basement walls.

A principle learned in the CERT program is to take care of your own safety first because if you don't, you won't be able to help anyone else. Amanda was unharmed so she ran up the stairs to wake up her parents, Mike and Missy, and her twin sisters, Chloe and Claire, and get them safely out of the house.

In the process, she closed the basement door to limit the oxygen supply and help contain the fire as much as possible.

As she was getting her family out of the house, smoke seeping from the basement to the main floor set off smoke alarms.

With family members awake and safely outside, Amanda and her father attempted to put out the fire. However, the blaze's head start made that impossible and there was nothing to do but wait for the fire department to arrive.

The end result: All family members were safe and unharmed. Family pets, including a cat, two guinea pigs and hamsters, died of smoke inhalation, but the family's Chihuahua-Dachshund-mix, Bear, was saved.

The interior of the Schmidt home was badly damaged. Exterior walls and roof were left standing, however the basement and main floor stripped bare. Work on rebuilding the inside has gotten under way and the family hopes to be back in their home this spring.

Amanda believes her CERT training played an important role in the incident.

"The program provides training that enables you to be a first responder whenever there's a national or local disaster that makes it impossible for police, fire and medical teams to be everywhere they are needed," she said.

In addition to dealing with fires, the program covers disaster preparedness, aspects of terrorism, first aid basics, including triage, light search and rescue techniques, hazardous materials and disaster psychology.

Then in her senior year (she graduated from Parkway in 2011), Amanda was one of the program's youngest participants.

"It's a great program," she said. "I just wish more people knew about it."

The program Amanda attended is conducted by the Manchester Police Department during late summer and fall months.

Capt. Chuck Hunn, the city's emergency management director, said the program is

**CERT, page 40**

not limited to residents.

"Anyone interested in helping other people is welcome," he said.

Amanda has pursued her interest in law enforcement by becoming a member of the St. Louis County Police Explorer Post 9774 that meets at the County's 7<sup>th</sup> Precinct in Valley Park. She holds the rank of lieutenant in the organization, which provides training and education in law enforcement practices and procedures, legal issues and other matters related to the police work. County police personnel serve as the group's advisers.

In addition to her studies at the Meramec

campus, she is president of the Criminal Justice Club there and works part time for the College police department.

Edward Ucinski, a member of the St. Louis Community College police department and a co-advisor at the Explorer Post, had high praise for Schmidt.

"Amanda has always been a dedicated member of the Explorer Post and an excellent president of the Meramec Criminal Justice Club," he said. "Of all of the students I have encountered over the years, she definitely has been one of the most dedicated, hard-working and selfless individuals I have met."

"I know Amanda never asked to be a hero, but most of our true heroes never do."

See **CERT, page 44**